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CASE-STUDY POSSIBILITIES

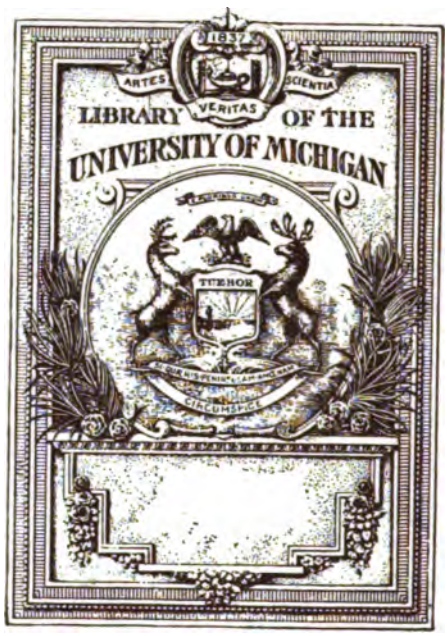
A FORECAST

By

ADA ELIOT SHEFFIELD

Director Research Bureau on Social Case Work

RESEARCH BUREAU ON SOCIAL CASE WORK
400 BOYLSTON ST., BOSTON
1922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PREFACE

The approach here proposed to a scientific study of group relations in family and neighborhood is based on the analysis of histories of a number of unmarried mothers. For social study the unmarried mother problem has special interest. First because it deals with a transient, or casual variation upon the family group. Whereas a normal family is a partnership between a strong worker and a socially competent mate for the long care of helpless young, this group precipitated by nature into a family status, is yet so disrupted by its lack of sanction in feeling that except for social pressure it disintegrates at once, the stronger parent usually taking his natural advantage to abscond, and the mother seeking the first chance to be relieved of an infant that keeps her in a status of maternity without honor. Second, the fact that illegitimacy makes an abortive family group relates it to several important and complex social questions. It involves at once the marriage laws, the social evil, the causal factors in infant mortality, and the phenomena of mental defect and instability. This complexity and theoretical scope, together with the practical oversight it entails for the detached and somewhat ostracized woman with a baby make illegitimacy a problem that, once grasped, should afford valuable data and a working method for other problems.

Adequately to demonstrate the possibilities of the type of analysis here proposed calls for its application to many more social histories. This task I am now entering upon.

The first two chapters of this monograph were read before the National Conference of Social Workers in 1921 and 1922, Chapter I having also appeared in the *Survey*. The first part of this chapter, however, has been entirely rewritten and some revisions made throughout.

I am indebted to the Permanent Charity Fund for the faith and patience they have shown in waiting for results from a piece of work which has proved much more exacting than I anticipated in its demand for carefully thought out preliminaries. I am also under obligation to a number of Boston social agencies which have not only allowed me access to their written records, but have generously permitted me to take the time of their workers for discussing problems involved in the case histories I have used.

A. E. S.

Boston, October, 1922.

CHAPTER I.

"CLUE ASPECTS" IN SOCIAL CASE WORK

The possibility of gradually building up a science of conduct, of personality conceived as a center of interpenetrating social forces has received recognition from one after another important spokesman in related social fields. A succession of students, increasing rapidly within the last decade, have been taking methodical steps to bring mental science to bear upon significant modes of behavior. This interest has been stimulated in part at least by the increasingly complex associational life of the modern world. Where men are congregated in large numbers, where they form themselves into business associations, trade unions, churches, clubs, lodges, leagues, boards, committees, the situations into which any one man may have to fit himself become infinitely varied. With these multiplied demands upon his adaptability any difficulties of adjustment between himself and his social and physical setting come to stand out conspicuously. Variations in the types of such "maladjustment" appear, while at the same time, so interlocked are social activities, the consequences of these frictions become of more serious import. The hope for social progress is that a systematic study of conduct, of social situations, may lead to a science which can be incorporated into educational methods and practically applied.

Obviously such a study must be based on concrete instances. At first thought one might expect that fiction of the better sort would afford a basis.[1] In it we find detailed accounts of the lives of men and women in a wide variety of settings, built up out of the experience of keen social observers. Why not study these stories? A further reflection gives the reason, namely, that although the best fiction may afford hypotheses for behavior patterns, their validity would still have to be tested out through

[1] Just as popular proverbs, maxims, and fables and quotations from great writers afford a basis of Alexander Shand's *Foundations of Character.*

instances from actual life. In a scientific sense no one can know that things happen typically as they do in this or that novel. This objection, one might think, would be met by using biographies as material for study. Here is the fact basis afforded by actual life. But a further requirement here comes to light. The evidence, documentary and observational, from which biographies are written is as a rule all in the closed book of the past. The events and circumstances of a man's life were not noted at the time they occurred by observers who had the study of conduct and situation patterns in mind, and cannot be subjected now to that steady interchange between continuing observation on the one hand and analysis and interpretation on the other, such as renders the fact content of histories progressively exact and relevant and at the same time tests the social student's findings. This sort of interchange, with the possibility of an indefinite enrichment of material for study, can be obtained through the histories of their clients (persons asking assistance) that are kept by the better-equipped case-work agencies (social agencies that assist individuals in need).

To persons unfamiliar with "case work," as it is inaptly called, a proposal to put its findings to use in the advancement of social science may seem ill-judged. Case work is often done under pressure of time, with scant funds, and by men or women unequal to more than a routine of kind offices in dealing with people who need help. The histories of their clients are written as narrative without causal connection, the happenings of each day being often hastily dictated to a stenographer in order to get them recorded before forgotten. But to any one who has been close to the work of well-equipped agencies and of qualified workers, these shortcomings are recognized as due to local or, it is hoped, temporary conditions. In the meantime the research student, by confining his request for cooperation to agencies that are in a position to do relatively "intensive" work, will find social histories that may be expected increasingly to repay attention.

These better-equipped agencies can, if they will, develop their now latent resources for this sort of social activity. In the

first place a fair number of them are already spending sufficient time and money to meet the needs for research cooperation suggested in this monograph. What the student will ask of them is more searching thought about the problems of their clients, a kind of reflection which will equally further an effective refinement of their own treatment methods. In the second place, well-equipped agencies are already concerning themselves to improve their methods of recording their knowledge of and dealings with clients. Third, the training of social case workers is already organized, a professional spirit is beginning to show itself among them, so that progressive organizations may anticipate with confidence a progress in the training and skill of those they employ.

The use of the word *material* as something which the student is to look to social agencies to supply does not for a moment mean that case work should become actuated by the purpose of collecting data for study. Its purpose, whether in gathering evidence or in using it must always be to help the client in the adjustment of himself and his affairs. This humanly interested aim is an actual advantage to the further use of the data for study. For the validity of a science of satisfactory living must be constantly tested by its "treatment" relevance, and hence may well be based on data collected with a practical end in view.

It is not here claimed that social case histories will yield data of every sort needed by a growing social science. The clients who appeal to agencies for assistance are apt to be people of limited group connections. Their family and neighborhood situations a sympathetic and skilled worker can come to understand well. The situations that develop among members of political organizations, unions, clubs, boards, committees and so on, must be studied from data that are supplemented from other sources than those ordinarily accessible to the case worker.

The Tentative Rationale of Analysis

If students of social science must be shown the possibilities in case-work study, practical workers on their side may ask whether as yet these pioneers have really sketched out a trustworthy con-

ception and rationale of their scientific task. In answer we find at least the foreshadowing of an agreed rationale of analysis in dealing with personality and situation. This analysis falls naturally into two main divisions: the individual's biological endowment, and the relationships which show the interplay between this native endowment and his social milieu. The first division would cover the individual's heredity, his physical and his mental make-up; the second would include his relation with his family and their neighborhood setting, his sexual life, his relation with employer and fellow employees, his recreational opportunities and choices, his church relation, and his response to the efforts of rehabilitating agencies public or private. Other group associations and their settings he might have also, but these are the ones about which social case workers most commonly get information.

The first of these two divisions is self-explanatory, and would probably be accepted without question. It gives that part of the case histories which has been more or less standardized by specialists in eugenics, medicine, and psychiatry. The second division, the one analyzing the specifically social facts, calls for explanation.

The proposal that these social facts should be analyzed in terms of relational groupings is based on a conception of personality. The ultimate units for the analysis of social situations are not personalities thought of as free agents set over against circumstances; they are rather this or that person's socially conditioned habits—established modes of activity—within which personality and circumstance are inseparable terms. Since all of any given person's significant habits form themselves within relationships between himself and environing persons, institutions, and ideas, his personality is a web-like creation of a self interacting with other selves in a succession of situations. As this idea gains ground we shall talk less of the individual as a solid and self-contained unit, moving and acting in an environment of other solid and self-contained units, all mutually distinct and external. We shall talk more of defining relationships, of motiva-

tions among lives that interpenetrate. This idea is in Dr. William White's mind when he writes,[1] "the interplay of forces between the individual and the environment is constant and never-ending. * * * The individual then becomes not a something apart from the environment and therefore apart from contact with the rest of the universe, but a place where innumerable forces are for the time being concentrated. In that sense the individual is only a transmitter and transmuter of energy while the terms individual and environment are only two extremes of the relationship."

If this is true, then what we ordinarily think of as the personality of a client appears and is developed in the interplay of character forces between himself and others in one and in another of the various groups of people which help to create and enrich his social life, each relationship affording situations that give scope and stimulus to some special aspect of his nature. It is within these various groupings that a man's values in life take shape. The things he prizes, his guiding sentiments of love, of family dignity, of ambition, of religion, of friendship, of citizenship—sentiments which "integrate" his habits and give purpose to his life—are all formed by the joint activity of his mind with other minds, organized into circles that conserve and reinforce those values.

A further step in the analysis of personality seems established. The relationships radiating from the self may reach to any of three distinct levels of interest: the level of other persons, the level of institutions, and the level of ideas. Within each field of relationship—that of sex, of occupation, of recreation, etc.—the level actually spanned by the web of interest depends on the vividness with which the personality has realized the potential values in that field. One girl, for instance, will grasp in the field of religion only her relation to worshipping neighbors and the officiating priests; a second will have a definite and vital sense of her church as an institution; more rarely a third will rise to the ideas of mystic experience by which religion can be

[1] "Mechanics of Character Formation", p. 243.

reflectively defined. At the other extreme may occur—in cases of arrested development or mental disorder—impulses and habits so unintegrated as to fall at a sub-personal level, attaining to no socializing function.

This is what social workers mean, sometimes vaguely it must be admitted, when they refer to the "social point of view." It differs from that of most medical men, psychiatrists included, and from that of most practicing psychologists—those who examine people for their intelligence levels. These specialists from the very nature of their training and their daily work, tend to take an atomic view of the individual, to think of him more as a self-sufficient unit impinged upon by environmental forces than as an integral part of his social setting. This fundamental difference of conception often prevents these members of the more established fields of study from getting as much as they might from social work. It stands in the way of their catching the relevance of many fact-items obtained by social agencies for their own treatment purpose. The difficulty at bottom is due to the fact that no one yet has subjected to methodical analysis and interpretation the data amassed in social histories. Any method which proves fruitful for the study of these histories may be expected in time to yield clarifying illustrations of the viewpoint of social workers.

The Case Worker's Opportunity

In two respects social case workers have a unique opportunity to further the specific application of this formula. First, their efforts to rehabilitate persons who for one reason or another are out of adjustment with their surroundings bring them into an intimate knowledge of the trials and struggles of these persons with their families, their work, their companions, extending over a considerable period of time—over months or even years. Second, they are dealing with difficulties or maladjustments which in some degree are universal. Their cases are merely conspicuous or exaggerated instances of failure in personal adaptation or in social machinery—the same in kind as those

which we all experience. From one point of view they may be thought of as representing society's analysis of its own maladaptations. Elements in the interplay of character and situation which everywhere make suffering, but which go unnoticed, hitches in the social machinery which everywhere bring a waste of human energy but which when slight may continue indefinitely unheeded, reveal themselves for what they are in maladjustments so pronounced that clients must turn to social workers for help. As normal psychology has profited from the study of dissociated and exaggerated pathological mental states, so may not sociology profit from the study of aberrations and failures in social adjustment? The problems involved in illegitimacy, for instance, are a case in point. Standards being what they are, practically every instance of unmarried motherhood represents some serious shortcoming in a girl's early family life, and something abortive in her instinctive promptings to start another family. It is often one of the symptoms of the recreational impoverishment among working people, and frequently goes along with vocational misfitness. Yet any one of these ills can be found separately in all walks of life, among all grades of people. Respectable families make serious mistakes in rearing their young; girls and women of unimpeachable virtue may meet with unhappiness in their sex life; a sigh over their early vocational misplacement rises from a large proportion of the middle-aged. For this reason I venture to hold that the analysis of cases of unmarried mothers, of deserted wives or widows, of delinquent or neglected children, and a reflective comparison between such analyses could be made to throw increasing light upon a considerable variety of the personal and educational problems of the average "normal" man and woman.

The Analysis of Case Histories

Such a contribution means that analysis must begin with case-recording, and that histories must be written, thinking must be done analytically instead of as at present in "storiette" sequence. What the case worker is concerned with is not a story,

but a problem which must be factored out before it can be solved. The categories af analysis I propose are the familiar ones of family, occupation, recreation, and so on, which have guided case workers in their investigation for many years. The new step would be first that workers should train themselves to think of the relationships, the interactions between client and milieu as the important things and second that in dictating their material to stenographers, they should, while keeping the chronological interview intact if desired, yet bear these relational categories in mind. It means a somewhat different way of thinking about case histories and will at first take more time. To compensate for this it holds promise, because of the sharper thinking that it induces, of a gain in power to give practical help to clients and of a steadily advancing professional insight.

For the purpose of comparative study analysis must be carried to a point further than this. A method for such sub-analysis and the interpretation that springs out of it will be discussed on page 54, but in order to illustrate what the analysis and comparison which I have in mind may yield, let me here discuss certain family relationships in the cases of three unmarried mothers, drawing the comparison on features of social experience in the home which for each girl contributed to her social nature and her ideals. By social experience in this connection I mean her education in sensitivity to public opinion—in the nature of society's approvals and disapprovals and in the manner in which those approvals and disapprovals are expressed. It is to be remembered that the family is not a single relationship, but a field of relations corresponding to a network of family functions. There is the relation between the parents, between parents and children, among the children themselves, to all of which the advent of grandchildren will add a new set. Any one member of a family may be thought of in several relations, each involving its appropriate function. The father is provider, protector, mirror of public opinion to his children; the mother is housekeeper and priestess of the home; the children are family pets, future breadwinners, budding citizens, etc. By exemplifying all these rôles the persons in a family sustain between them

the distinctive sentiments in the family field; and, since these sentiments set patterns of habit for all concerned, it is reasonable to expect that in a family where a daughter has been unchaste something impaired or abortive will be found among the family relationships. Whatever in the data in the case shall appear to affect the functioning of habits that sway the girl's social thinking will be a clue of the scientific sort which it is hoped will be recognized in future social work. Observation, that is, will aim to identify clue-aspects in the state of the girl's self-family relations.

All three of the unmarried mothers here considered were healthy girls; two of them were normal in intelligence, while one was perhaps slightly subnormal. The fathers of all three were of the grade of small proprietors. One of them owned his own fishing-craft, the other two their farms. All three were industrially stable and all the families had lived a number of years in detached houses. The neighborhoods in which they lived might be described as being one rural, one semi-rural (within city limits but in farming country) and one outskirt (in a part of the city just beyond the more thickly populated center). In all three instances both mother and child ended by becoming happily assimilated into the community. At this point the resemblances that concern our study end. In their family relations the three daughters had three distinct types of handicap that were contributory to their social lapse.

In the first family the relevant facts were as follows: The father, although a sober man, was habitually ugly and abusive at home, giving way to a violent temper and beating the children. They were much afraid of him, as was also his wife. For example, when the latter learned of her daughter's pregnancy, she appeared indifferent except to the possibility of her husband's finding it out. Overworked, with numerous children, the wife kept an untidy home, and made no attempt to cope with her husband or to control her boys and girls. The latter quarreled among themselves. The girl in question said that her father was sometimes kind to the others, never to her, and that she therefore avoided him at all times. She could recall no show of

affection from either parent during her whole childhood—a fair indication that the parents took no pleasure in their little girl.

In such a family the father, who should have exemplified to his children the social approvals and disapprovals which their conduct would meet outside the family group, failed in his function as a representative to them of the community. Parental anger had for them no significance because it was incalculable, immoderate, prompted not by social sentiments but by nerves. Missing on the one hand the intimations of a fostering parental concern and on the other the incipient signs of social demurring, the children developed no fineness of response. They might be described as socially hard of hearing. In this connection it may not be fanciful to point out that when it came to the girl's love affairs, her sex impulses showed themselves with as little subtlety as had her father's anger. Her flirtations might be described as crass. What else could be expected of a young person who had never been initiated into that common social language of quiet looks, gestures, intonations, through which most persons learn to sense the feelings of others, and to express their own various shades of approval and disapproval? The worker who knows this girl well speaks of her as being markedly "obtuse to public opinion." In the home of a foster mother she would hang around listening to conversations that did not concern her, and could not seem to comprehend the fact that she was not wanted. She was entirely untroubled and unashamed at the prospect of bearing a child out of wedlock and for a long time could not seem to grasp the fact that with such a child her standing was different from that of a married woman.

The facts in this girl's family situation disclose two distinct aspects of the parental-filial web that are important as clues not only to her case but to others in which they are likely to recur. They are, first, the *socially irrelevant anger* and, second, the *deficient parental joy*. Each of these represents an impairing of the function of a sentiment which contributes to right living.

In the second family the mother, a handsome, vigorous woman, was probably unfaithful to the father at one period; two brothers have been pilferers. They did wrong but they all have

apparently rebounded; the mother and sister are leading unimpeachable lives, the brothers seem to be going perfectly straight. In their life at home this family enjoy each other. Every Sunday the married daughter, her husband and children come to spend the afternoon with her parents—all of them, parents, brothers and sisters, sitting together for talk. The mother is devoted to her illegitimate grandchild, as is also her husband; she gives the best care to the baby, which she is willing to have taken for her own.

The daughter in question "fell" easily. Although previously chaste, and although fully instructed in sex matters by her mother, her intimacy with the father of her child began on slight acquaintance. At no time does there seem to have been the least sentiment between them, or even a liking that could be called strongly personal. Nor had the man suggested marriage. When asked why she did this thing, the girl answered that she did it "to please him." The social worker who first talked with her said her head seemed filled with the idea of being the central figure in the marriage ceremony. Neither she nor her family took her situation hard. On the contrary, they appeared highly cheerful at the prospect of being able to force marriage upon the man. When, later, it became evident that he would not be a good provider, they turned against the marriage. Their one concern was to keep the incident concealed from the neighbors.

These facts, together with the sister's belated marriage and the mother's probable lapse from fidelity, indicate the family's attitude toward marriage. They apparently looked upon a husband as a supporting male—a good enough notion so far as it goes, but taken by itself, a notion on the infrapersonal level. Their cheerfulness over the prospect of a marriage brought about under what would ordinarily be considered unpropitious and humiliating conditions suggests that in their minds sex-gratification was a sufficient guarantee of happiness. Their idea of sex attraction was what Wilfred Lay would call an immature or disintegrated conception, since it included neither affection, nor companionship, and therefore did not rise to the sentiment of love. As a correlative to this family lack in sex sentiment was the

mother's apparent lack of respect for marriage as an institution. She fell short in her function as priestess of the home.

In this illustration family life, admirable on the personal level, is accompanied by an unsocialized attitude toward marriage, which was apparently a factor in the daughter's uncontrol. The two outstanding aspects in her family situation were, first, that her mother failed as a steadying symbol of wedlock to the girl's inchoate sex-promptings, and, second, that the very congeniality of the whole family group made them self-sufficient and inattentive to outside opinion. These aspects may be conveniently termed *maternal symbol of wedlock* and *self-sufficient family group*.

The third family, respectable elderly people, fond of each other, not only took the greatest joy in their one daughter but gave her religious instruction and all the educational opportunities their means would allow. The girl was of a pliable, affectionate disposition and fully returned their devotion, spending most of her time out of school or working hours at home. This she did in spite of being very popular among the church people and neighborhood. The community contained few young people, and the two or three young men in town the girl knew but slightly. When she became pregnant, the only men whose names were suggested as possibly responsible were several familiar acquaintances of the parents, in age two or three times that of the girl. Although one of these men had paid her considerable attention, the mother said he could not possibly be responsible, because she herself had always been present when he called. The two had never been alone. She remarked, when expressing her grief over her daughter, that she had hoped no one would ever wish to marry the girl because she desired to keep her for herself. The responsible man was married.

In this case the daughter was apparently thought of as a household pet and handmaid, rather than as a person who was to assume adult responsibilities. Her social nature was sensitized to a quickness of sympathy and readiness in helping others that made her everywhere beloved—and then her parents wished to limit her in the field of family relationship to the filial function

alone. The girl's balked impulses took their one opportunity toward widening her range of function. The phrase which I suggest as giving a clue-aspect of the sentiment here revealed is *affectionate parental monopoly.*

The Need of a Social Terminology

In judging the validity of these interpretations, the reader will bear in mind that these histories were not written nor were the facts observed with any intensive study in view. Moreover, the social vocabulary used by case workers is so far from uniform, notably in the use of descriptive adjectives, that in spite of careful checking up, I may still have received mistaken impressions. In fact, any advance in the scientific standing of case work is conditioned, as I shall discuss later on page 50, upon a refining of our descriptive vocabulary. It is with this in mind that I have attempted to supply such interpretative terms as self-sufficient family life and affectionate parental monopoly, in order to identify clue-aspects for each relationship. As one case history follows another, all analyzed and interpreted on the same general plan, these terms will begin to take on an explicitness of meaning which at present they lack. Meanwhile even the vague terms used in the beginning will have the effect of leading workers to observe with more discrimination and to note more alertly the significant indications of interplay between endowment and milieu. Such improved terms as socially irrelevant anger, affectionate parental monopoly, do at least this: they supply a worker with a set of expectations as to the possibilities within a case. And she will work with the inspiriting conviction that she is testing her observations by ideas destined to count in a science of society.

CHAPTER II

PUBLIC AGENCIES AS PUBLIC CARRIERS OF IDEAS

The case analysis and comparison of the instances cited in the preceding chapter have served to crystallize and make articulate interpretations of several habitual modes of activity and feeling that may take place within the family group. Involved in the activities discussed in all three families is the idea that it is the function of the home to prepare children for a social life, to orient them towards the demands of larger social units. The practical meaning of such an idea, the practical situations to be met in the course of making it effective, can be identified by just the sort of analysis that is here under discussion. If case analysis helps to make social ideas concrete, it is for educational agencies of every description to make valid ideas current. One carrier of social ideas is the public philanthropic agency.

The Public Agency an Agency of Public Opinion

The policies of a public philanthropic agency naturally begin as half-defined habits of action. A public official will say with all sincerity that he treats each case that comes before him on its unique merits; yet if he takes time to look back over a period of years upon the relief or service that his agency has given, say, to ambitious mothers, he will probably find that he has tended to deal with family situations roughly similar as to the factor of maternal ambition in an *increasingly* similar way. In other words, he has formed a habit of action without realizing it. This habit, because he has thought of his clients as detached instances appearing one by one, has remained but vaguely recognized. Once he thinks of the ambitious mothers he has treated as a class, wherein a characteristic feature is recurrent, he grows aware of a drift in his habitual treatment. He can recognize such a drift as having a cumulative influence, and he is in a position to inquire whither that influence is tending—what is the feeling, the prejudice perhaps, the idea which has become embodied in it, and what may be the direct and indirect conse-

quences of this idea as carried to the minds of the people helped and of their neighbors. In short, he finds himself responsible for a policy.[1]

A philanthropic policy, then, begins as a vague habit of action and ends as a carrier of a socially formative idea. Take, for example, the policy by which any state agent boards out dependent children in families of their own religion. Back of this policy is the idea that church and state should be fields of interest mutually independent, that the state agency should not identify itself with the establishment of any one religion. Again, the policy that a foreign-born child must be given opportunity to learn English applies the idea that the unifying of a people—"Americanizing" as it is called here—requires a common language. So again, a habit of giving public relief grudgingly, though it doubtless springs from the need of guarding the public purse, yet it grows articulate as an appeal to the recipient's self-respect, and the public agent becomes a virtual spokesman for the idea that self-support means social standing and that dependency carries a social stigma.

This means that in applying policies our State Boards of Charity, relief officers, agents of Mothers' Pensions, take their place among the public educators. That we do not ordinarily so regard them is because we find their habits of action only half-articulately set out as explicit policies, and because it is only

[1] This suggests that the current notion that boards of directors frame policies calls for qualification. Boards can either take over policies which have developed and been tested out in some agency similar to their own, or else they can confirm or modify some habitual treatment of a typical situation which their case workers have been meeting. The former method is the more usual, because it requires less initiative; the latter, although seldom found, is the one which makes for progress. The appraisal of dawning policies is rare because it demands case workers who are not only trained to watch for recurring situations, but who are candid and courageous enough to submit their habits of meeting these situations to the scrutiny of a board. To present an occasional puzzling family problem to a committee or board does not put its members in the way of deciding upon a policy. This is merely a detached decision. The worker must rather present to them a group of similar problems together with the treatment that was given and its outcome, and do it in a way that will enable a board to compare them in the brief space of a meeting.

when a policy has emerged into explicitness that we can identify its kernel-idea and trace its influence. At present a relief officer is apt to think of a policy as something merely negative in its function. It is something to avert trouble: a rule to fall back upon when politicians become importunate, a maxim that affords safe talking points when hostile criticism impends. But as something with educational influence its function is positive, and the officer who brings his policies into the open, who invites scrutiny and appraisal of their ramifying consequences, becomes an agent for social thinking.

Our modern community has become so complex and manifold that the ideas which are to form and animate it must demand our increasing concern. The things that a man prizes and strives for are increasingly marked for him by the fact that men in neighborhoods, in organized groups, in social classes, are striving for them. The values thus collectively appreciated, and motivating all this striving, become social forces, collective habits of feeling and behaving—traditions. Consciously identified as ideas, they become a formative social heritage for each oncoming generation; and since for better or for worse this heritage is subject to continual change, it becomes momentous for the community what values are to be collectively endorsed, how they are to be made socially contagious and operative. In a simpler social order this responsibility for ideas might be entrusted to certain agencies of direct concern with ideas: to schools, to churches, to organizations for propaganda. By these agencies our cultural standards could be identified, evaluated, promulgated, and then left to embody themselves in men's lives and actions. But in our complex order the lives and actions of individual men are cut across by various group-interests and institutions which water-mark their minds in ways which affect the further fortunes of ideas. Besides the agencies of direct concern with ideas we must recognize the educational rôle of certain agencies of indirect concern, notably our courts and our philanthropic agencies which in their dealings with case after case are really applying current ideas and reinforceing current feeling.

From What Level of Public Opinion Shall Standards Be Drawn?

Whether he wishes it or not, therefore, the modern official of a public philanthropy is an agent of public opinion. And the great question for a democratic community is the question from what level of public opinion are its agencies to take the quality of their ideas. The tradition is that these agencies should reflect the average standards. Public officials, for example, have within the last decade reflected a popular change in attitude towards the recipients of relief, a qualifying of the pauper stigma. That both the older attitude and the newer represent the level of average thinking is apparent from the objective, simple, patent character of their causes. Our colonial forebears had harsh conditions of living. There was little surplus wealth, and the mother country often shifted its ne'er-do-wells upon the young community. Public relief made itself felt in the average citizen's purse with no light touch. It was no wonder that they denied social standing to one who had "come upon the town." Today, however, the economic situation fosters a very different average sentiment. The country is rich; the community is so large that no average person feels the burden of relief as such. Moreover during periods of business depression or of industrial conflict numerous families ordinarily self-supporting find themselves depending on benefits and relief. It becomes easy to think of dependents as casualties of an unsettled industrial order, and the average opinion makes little of any stigma in their plight.

Another policy expressive of average opinion appears among those printed by the Mothers' Aid Department of Massachusetts. It reads:

"The former standard of living of a family, as well as the standards of self-supporting families in its neighborhood, should be considered in determining the amount of aid necessary."

What we have here is a recognition of the claim of status. The family will not be adequately relieved if it feels its social standing unsustained. And the criteria of social standing, as they exist for the average opinion, are not hard for the relief de-

partment to ascertain and deal with: they lie chiefly in such matters as food, dress, and living quarters.

The Idea of Status as Involving Social Standards

Now if our relief officers and other public agents, when they develop policies that touch such motivating ideas as this idea of status, are to reflect merely average opinion, let us note how crude, how objective, and how barren is the social thinking that they will unwittingly confirm. Popular thinking about status, if it can be said to analyze the idea, does little more than divide it into factors thought of as genuine and important and factors thought of as superficial and trivial. Such factors as occupational success, education, respect for business and family morality it treats as genuine and important. The values they represent obviously coincide with a man's social usefulness. Such factors as dress, manners, speech-habits it regards as superficial and trivial. Dress seems little more than the uniform of prosperity. Manners, being in Emerson's phrase "the happy way of doing things," seem but the ornament of aristocracy—the graces bred of leisure and the drawing room. In a democracy their use has been described by Professor E. A. Ross as that of a lubricant, the function of politeness being "not to sweeten the relations of kinsfolk, friends, or lodge brothers, but to lessen the chafing between strangers, colleagues, or rivals." Speech-habits seem but symbols of one's habitual nearness to or remoteness from book-culture.

The average opinion about these matters, then, makes them seem of too little consequence to draw any serious concern from the social worker. The public social agency may touch them to enhance, to deflect, or to inhibit, without drawing upon itself any public notice, whether for praise or for blame. But are these matters rated as of so little import by opinion at the professional level? Do specialists in social psychology and social ethics treat them as mere external graces and empty symbols, or as matters that display varying drifts towards standards socially momentous? If the latter be true, does the official worker rise to the

full measure of his opportunity for public service when he forms and administers policies that merely jog along with the general obtuseness to the more delicate integrations of social impulse such as make up the desire for social standing?

Be it noted that, however slighting may be the average articulate opinion about status, the average practice is by no means indifferent to it. Thousands of men and women in this land of fluid caste-lines are taking as much pains to establish themselves in appropriate dress, polite manners, and accepted speech-usages as to achieve business success. When they fall into difficulties that make them the clients of public philanthropy, the public official, if he has eyes to see, will see status-motivated situations at every turn in their careers. The higher possibilities in what he is to do for them depend on the expertness, the liberal enlightenment of his dealings with these social symbols. Dress he will recognize not only as a symbol of prosperity and a medium of sexual and æsthetic enhancement but as an aid to social presentability and an opener of social opportunity. Manners he will deal with as the expression between people of a mutual recognition of each other's feelings and claims. They are conduct in minor matters, filling the spaces between more considered acts, and are often more character-revealing than the latter; for since the occasions of this minor conduct occur and pass in a moment, the delicacy and quickness of a client's behavior are signs of his social sensitiveness. Even speech-habits will not escape attention. It may seem but a petty snobbery to notice when a client says "I'm glad to meet you" instead of "Pleased to meet you," "This is Mr. Jones" instead of "I want to make you acquainted with Mr. Jones." But the social worker trained to note the language characteristic of different social groups[1]—the differ-

[1] "His social experience, traditions and general background, his ordinary tastes and pursuits, his intellectual and moral cultivation are all reflected in each man's conversation. These factors determine and modify a man's mode of speech in innumerable ways. They may affect his pronunciation, the speed of his utterance, his choice of vocabulary, the shade of meaning he attaches to particular words or turns of phrase, the character of such similes and metaphors as occur in his speech, his word order and the structure of his sentences." —Wyld, H. C.: "History Modern Colloquial English, Chap. X, p. 359.

ences of social tone conveyed by enunciation and voice-inflections, by formulæ of greeting, of approval and disapproval, etc., by the familiarities and reticences to be taken for granted—will have clues both for interpretation and for treatment of a client's case. What sympathy, what social prevision the agency can bring to bear depends on the worker's qualification to discern the remoter implications and consequences that are latent in these seemingly small matters. If he makes himself responsible to socially expert opinion, he will watch how his policies affect the various factors in an idea so dynamic as this of status. He will make himself responsible for the future fortunes of ideals, and this means that in dealing with a client in this and that relationship he will reckon with the kinds of approval and disapproval which different groups confer, the factors in conduct which these approvals stress, the *quality* of the social forces thus set afoot.

All this the public official, beset with emergent demands upon his attention, can hardly initiate. The quality of social forces can be assayed only through careful study. If the student succeeds in making such qualitative distinctions clear, the public official can give his conclusions or hypotheses the test of practical application.

So important for the future influence of social work is this distinguishing of quality in the formative ideas it touches that I venture to dwell a little further on the idea of status as it became concretely involved in the cases[1] of three girls, each of whom lost standing by the plight of unmarried motherhood.

The first girl, Rachel, was Jewish. She was an immigrant who came to this country in her latter teens with her father, brothers and sisters, the mother having died. Her father was a scholar of standing among his people, saturated in Talmudic learning, and orthodox in all his conceptions; and the family settling among neighbors of their own race, this old man was held in high respect. The girl was unusually endowed both in

[1] These cases were of course analyzed and interpreted by the same method as that advocated throughout this monograph. (See p. 10 and p. 40ff.)

intelligence and refinement. She became deeply in love with and expected to marry a young man of Americanized ways, whose success in getting an American education she and her family identified with superiority of character. They all considered that Rachel was doing well. When in the course of time it became known to them that she had two children born out of wedlock to this man, the shock and grief of the old father were beyond description. Suffering and moral indignation united to make him unrelenting. The children, of course, he would not even see; Rachel he kept at home, meeting her with reproaches at every turn and holding her sin up to her on every occasion. If she went to see her children, which she had to do by stealth, he would ask on her return whether she had been earning money on the street. Her brother would not even remain in the same room with her, and her brothers-in-law felt much the same way. Respectable families in the neighborhood forbade their daughters to associate with her. Being too refined to enjoy the companionship of the only sort of girl willing to be seen with her, Rachel was left entirely without companionship. No more extreme punishment can be conceived. The story is racially typical, although it is an exaggeration of the typical at certain points.

The second girl, Molly, was a New England Methodist living in a little farming village. The scattered population was mainly Yankee, respectable people who attended the one church in the place. Their group-consciousness, therefore, was a matter partly of common nationality, partly of church affiliation, but may be assumed to have been less intense than that of a Jewish neighborhood. Molly and her family were distinctly less endowed than the Jewish family, their education being slight, and the girl's intelligence mediocre. She was, however, an obedient, loving daughter, a girl whose nature it apparently was to conform to the standards about her, and who was generally liked and respected. The father of her child was a married man, rather forceful in appearance, for whom she felt affection. In this instance it was an old mother on whom fell the shock and sorrow, a self-denying devoted parent. For months after learning Molly's condition this mother was distracted. At first her dread

was lest the neighbors learn the disgrace, because, as she said, no such terrible thing had ever happened in that village before. Her dread proved justified. After the neighbors had learned the situation and during the daughter's period of confinement, this woman for two or three months was visited by none of the neighbors, and week after week saw no living creature except the grocer and postman once a week, a pet cat and a neighbor's dog that had been accustomed to visit the house. Later the clergyman showed sympathy and understanding; so sure was he, however, that the village people would ostracize the family that he urged their leaving their home and moving to another city. He described his parishioners as kind-hearted and friendly but as feeling strongly about wrong-doing. Against his advice the old mother clung to her home and received into it her daughter and baby. What humiliation may have been borne by these two women we do not know. We do know that Molly, who is of a mild and pleasing disposition, won her way back into the good opinion of her neighbors, and that she and her child were both in time received into the church.

The third girl, Janice, was an American of good ability who grew up in a moderate-sized city in what is called an American neighborhood—that is, among English-speaking people whose racial extraction may or may not have been the same. The neighborhood as such had no group life. The people were split up among different churches; certain of them found a tie with their fellows through the Grange. Otherwise families living near each other had merely chance friends here and there. Since the family of the girl in question were self-centered people whose church connection was nominal and who were not members of the Grange, they were quite detached from any socialized life. Yet apparently they had a regard for outward respectability which suggests that they sensed collective requirements for status either in their neighborhood or in a vaguely felt public outside. Their house, which was on a street with stable working people, was always kept painted and in better repair than those about. The family were clean and made a good appearance personally and in their conversation. This is noteworthy because their his-

tory behind scenes shows them to have been people whose conception of the sex relation was matter-of-fact and thoroughly coarse. The daughter's misconduct insofar as it was unnoticeable by others did not appear to affect them as a very serious departure from standards. Janice herself had a chequered youth. As to the paternity of her child she was uncertain as between two men for neither of whom she had any sentiment other than a friendly liking. Yet she, like her family, had a regard for outward respectability. Indeed this trait became evident as a distinct impulse to identify herself with a group superior to her own. It was not that she had come in contact with any special set of which she wished to be one; it appeared rather as if she had an undefined notion of the existence of desirably placed people who possessed the symbols of superior status. She took pains with her dress partly because she recognized that good clothes might enlarge her opportunities of attracting men of better social position than her own; she cultivated the personal refinement of carefully tended hands, of gentle manners; she was offended if invited to a cheap restaurant and became gracious and amiable when taken to a modish one. In short she had the makings of a social climber.

If the agency dealing with these cases reflected nothing more than the average opinion upon them, what discrimination of any import would it display? Average opinion would have something to say about the individual girls by way of conventional appraisal of their characters. It would note the intelligence and refinement of Rachel, the fact that her misdoing was with a man she loved and expected to marry; it would note the amiable pliability of Molly, the shallowness of Janice. If it looked at all beyond the individual girl, it would stop with the immediate family group, contenting itself here with an impressionistic rating of the family respectability. But the *quality* of that respectability, the degree to which the family group mirrors ideals and standards that are the social contribution of larger groups—of all this the average thought would miss the significance.

Yet these cases surely invite attention to social forces, to social valuations of far-reaching concern. The case of Rachel

involved first the Jewish respect for learning. Her misplaced confidence in the young man was an overrating—which her family shared—of the social worth of his American education. Being unfamiliar with the educational standards and the tokens of social integrity in a new country, they imputed to him more gentlemanly implications of scholarship than he deserved. Rachel's case involved a further point of social moment. The bitterness, even cruelty of her father would be imperfectly understood if one failed to view the family in its relation to the Jewish community before which the father stood as an exponent of tradition. The religious tradition of Israel, with its Messianic hope, has carried a promise, shared by each humble man and woman, that from them might spring a great spiritual leader for their people. Whether literally held as a faith or not, such a tradition has fostered a dim emotional appreciation of the infinite collective consequences of the act of procreation—an act otherwise so easily thought of as of merely private import. The agency dealing with this Jewish girl could not realize its full possibilities of influence without a sympathetic sense of the *quality* of the social status that was here violated.

The case of Molly involved the social sanctions which an evangelical Methodism carried in a scattered farming community. The tradition here harks back to John Wesley's preaching of redemption, of sin as the forfeiting of one's standing before God, with the consequence of exclusion from God's ideal community in the hereafter. Such a tradition is perhaps more congenial to the Yankee individualism of these farm folk, in that it stresses the consequences of the sinful act as falling upon the individual, and postpones the realizing of its collective ideals to a life beyond. Yet even here a sense of the collective stake in the sinful act is latent, and in such a situation as Molly's would count for good if tactfully brought into play.

The case of Janice involved the problem—ever present in a democratic society—of putting the aspiration and consciousness of caste upon a valid basis. In an aristocratic society of the simpler old-fashioned type caste was not a serious disturber of

social valuations. The landholding families at the top, mellowed by generations of undisputed privilege, used their position and wealth with some sense of *noblesse oblige*. They enjoyed at least a presumption that the outward embellishments of high living were but the appropriate marks of a superior strain in their nature. If their embellishments were copied by the newly rich, who missed their inner graces of dignity and delicacy, the authentic exemplars nevertheless continued in the public eye for comparison and correction, and their place in the general regard was not usurped by expensive imitations. In America of today there is no such ease of identification in the marks of social worth. We have no aristocratic caste whose graces would command a semi-official recognition as the tokens of gentility. In its place we have several groups whose position is socially esteemed. Diverse in their occupations—financial, professional, artistic—they do not unite to present a clear front against pretentious shams. Meanwhile the near-genteel groups, people whose crudity of appetite and poverty of interest are easily overlooked amid their unrivalled upholstery, get for their tastes and standards a continuous publicity through the Sunday supplements and the movies. To a girl who, like Janice, had taken her social education from these sources, there was nothing incongruous between her family's eager concern with comeliness in all their outward show and their grossness in treating the sexual relation as a matter merely of transient personal indulgence. Here was a case for re-education of one whose social training was utterly amiss.

Briefly as I have been obliged to sketch these cases, I have mentioned enough to suggest first that the public official, in dealing with the actual individual, is working at the only point where social values can be concretely grasped, and secondly, that these values are to be more sharply identified and practically influenced through the client's group relationships. The individual is the string on which all social overtones come into being, but the group is the sounding-board by which they gain poignancy and power.

Policies Carry Sanctions for Social Ideas

The practical drift of all this concern with ideas will grow apparent to the public worker as he finds that his policies are bound to act as sanctions for ideas. Here is a mother seeking relief. She is a clever manager: she makes over and cooks over with tireless care and resourcefulness, and she thereby clothes and feeds her brood on less than will keep any neighbor going. By what idea of fitness should her relief be gauged? The safe and easy idea would be to equalize her present comfort with her neighbor's comfort by a dole below any neighbors' minimum demand. A more enlightened idea would be to equalize the relief with the neighbors' minimum and let her good management reap a little reward in a bettered standard of living. Such a question rises many times in dealing with foreign mothers—with people said to live on "next to nothing." Is the maximum ambition that we are able to recognize in the immigrant the urge to keep together body and soul? If the public practice answers yes to this question, we are giving official sanction to the idea that peasants shall stay peasants for all we care. For better or for worse such official sanctions of formative ideas are at work in the lives of our clients and of their groups. They blur or sharpen the conduct-patterns—habitual modes of behavior in clients and their groups—by which our social standards are realized. What we need is courage and skill to bring all available sanctions to bear upon a socially formative idea, especially where its consequences are too remote and inconspicuous to enlist a spontaneous group endorsement. Even unchastity will become an almost tractable evil when we can once underwrite the law's restraint with society's all-compelling formula: "It isn't done."

CHAPTER III

A FUTURE FUNCTION OF PRIVATE AGENCIES

The discussion of social status or standing was used in the preceding chapter to illustrate the opportunity for public officials to bring enlightened insight to bear in their work. The conception of status there broached sprang from a comparative study of certain similar groups of fact-items which stood out in a number of social case histories analyzed by the Research Bureau. These groups of items kept recurring, with social status indicated as their meaning, and between them suggestive resemblances and differences began to appear. The notion of a desire for status as a social force promises to lead along fruitful lines of thought and to have a bearing on several questions of major concern. Certain ideas fundamental to the discussion of this "force" may throw light on so apparently unrelated a subject as the division of function between public and private agencies for social case work.

The Bearing Upon This Question of the Function of Agencies Other Than Social

The question as to a workable division of function between public and private social agencies has undergone so much fruitless rehashing that an enlargement of its scope to include the function of other than the so-called "social work" agencies may serve to fertilize reflection. What division between public and private effort in general seems to exist?

A review of the range of responsibility placed by legislatures upon public departments of various sorts shows that in the main their statutory duties parallel such social needs as involve the most immediate and conspicuous consequences. The consequences of a neglect of public defence or of the maintenance of order are evident to the most sluggish mind; those of neglect of highway upkeep are today almost equally so; whereas the end-results of public health activities, bank inspection, public education, factory inspection, and so on represent a progressively in-

creasing demand upon social imagination. There must be a manifestness in public needs in order to stir citizens collectively to deal with them. When the benefits that would follow collective action are less conspicuous, even though equally far-reaching—as in the case of baby hygiene—public interest is sluggish and a few citizens of more social imagination must fill the breach through privately endowed enterprise. Furthermore, among the duties placed upon the public departments those covering fields in which the consequences of a disregard for social interest are the most obvious are likely in the long run to be best performed.

A case in point will be found in the field of law-enforcing agencies. Some laws are evidently more easy to enforce than are others. Why is it? The facile answer is that public opinion is solidly behind one law and is more or less divided on another. While this of course is true, may we not go one step further and ask why it is that public opinion—at least a formidable minority opinion—fails to rally behind certain laws whose intent is clearly beneficent, laws, for example, against the social evil and gambling, and notably the Volstead Act? The answer appears to be that many citizens do not see any clear consequences of the proscribed conduct which will affect social well-being. They think of it as lying in the realm of manners or of sectarian codes rather than in that of socially responsible behavior. According to this opinion manners, morals, and actions responsible to the law seem things differing in kind, manners and morals being thought of as mainly personal, actions before the law alone as properly subject to a social concern. Actually the three differ rather in the immanence and obviousness of the collective stake in them: minor conduct, viewed in any longer social vista, often attaining a major import. Where the collective stake is neither immanent nor obvious, where average opinion does not feel that the conduct in question really injures other citizens, men who indulge in it will not lose social status even when their conduct actually infringes the law. Disregard for law on the part of men who nevertheless maintain excellent standing, men who in other respects are law-abiding, is presumptive evidence that the law itself lacks "prac-

ticality," that it fails to take account of some important factor in the actual situation.

That factor, in such laws as those instanced, lies in the conflict they occasion with the pleasure-habits, or habits of relaxation, that have been formed by thousands of average people. They bear upon men who in their youth make part of the social evil, and upon men who have stocked cellars or carry hip-flasks, yet who work steadily, live up to current business standards, support and educate their children, and even manifest public spirit. One must recognize degrees in wrongdoing. Were a craving for irresponsible excitement always carried to gross extremes, the social or drink evil would be easy to combat. The dreadful and dramatic price paid in degradation and in the suffering of the families of a sot or a roué, if it always or usually accompanied indulgence, would be a warning which only the dull would fail to heed. But such an outcome, athough frequent, is not the rule. The moderate pleasure-habits of men and women who while confessing them to be unideal yet find in them relief from fatiguing routine or concentration are habits that have a social effect of which the harmfulness is quite imperceptible to the average view. These citizens, moreover, outnumber many times those who fall into depravity. It is to this fact that one must look for an explanation of the unenforcements under discussion.

The Need for a Study of Public Sensitiveness to Consequences

What is here needed is a study of the sensitiveness to consequences in the public mind. The average man has some notion of a collective stake in any personal indulgence which is overt and annoying. Exactly why has he so imperfect a sense of harms that develop cumulatively and at several removes? The answer is to be found in the group-sanctioned habits that condition his thinking. Evidently then, it must be the function of some agency, whether public or private, to make systematic additions to our understanding of that vague welter of ideas and habits that we call "public opinion." All processes of social betterment

... processes among the conduct-patterns and situa... that either further or retard progressive thinking. What ... needed is not propaganda for moral ends. Upon ends ... little real disagreement. What we need is socially valid ... and the validity of any means by which average people ... clarify their thinking about causes and consequences de... on the soundness of our knowledge of average habits, ... and sentiments. As John Dewey has remarked, "Unless ... are to be dreams and idealism a synonym for romanticism and phantasy-building, there must be a most realistic study of actual conditions and of the mode or law of natural events, in order to give the imagined or ideal object definite form and solid substance—to give it, in short, practicality and constitute it a working end."[1]

At present no agency of any kind, whether public or private, is responsibly charged with the function of advancing this sort of social understanding. As among case-work agencies the prevailing idea of a division of function is this: that private agencies are to experiment, to deal with needs of which the social import is unknown or uncertain, and that public agencies are to take over the concern with needs of which the social import has become generally recognized. Private agencies may demonstrate the need for school visitors. Once the need for school visitors has been proved, the public may authorize school boards to employ them. Private agencies are to set and maintain standards, to make evident and to keep before the public the social benefit of a progressive refinement of care for persons in need. They undertake to individualize "case work" instead of merely to distribute relief doles. Public agencies will then adopt the standards thereby set. They will individualize their care of applicants in so far as the pubic can be brought to pay for it.

In this current idea of the rôle of private agencies there is nothing to conflict with a proposal to enlarge their function by turning their social observations to scientific account. Leaders in other fields of public responsibility are ready to draw upon their

[1] "Human Nature and Conduct," p. 236.

experience.[1] And the nature of their work makes their experience such as can readily be turned to theoretical profit. The private case-worker, moving among the daily activities of average people, is advantageously placed to observe the standard-forming processes of habit and circumstance.

The Change of Appeal With Change of Function

Such an enlargement of function for the private agency will of course involve a change of appeal in its work. Here lies a real difficulty. Privately supported agencies are under the constant necessity of keeping their boards of directors and their body of contributors interested. In selecting cases for care they must therefore take this into account. Directors are apt to become discouraged by the prospect of assisting families or children that involve long-continued expense or that give scant promise of a successful outcome of care. They prefer "temporary" situations which can be adjusted within a reasonably short time, and which will therefore admit of their assuming responsibility for a larger number of families. The larger number together with a fortunate outcome make the best appeal to contributors. As one general secretary said, "We raise money on our successes."

Natural as is this concern for numbers and outcome, it is likely to conflict with a concern for the wider social import in the cases chosen. Fortunately the lack of this wider concern promises to bring its own cure. Discontent with the trend of private case-work agencies is appearing among young workers. It is expressed in such words as "case work has no vision," "social work does not get anywhere," "agencies do not know what they are aiming at." The meaning of this attitude, unspoken because it might sound inhumane, is a dissatisfaction over spending so

[1] "In order to construct a scheme of social interests that will serve the jurisprudence of tomorrow as the thoroughly elaborated schemes of natural rights served the jurisprudence of yesterday, the social sciences must co-operate."—Roscoe Pound: *Harvard Law Review*, February, 1915, p. 345. Any study, for example, of the factors that enter into the unenforceability of law, would involve the combined qualifications of lawyers and social students applied to the data afforded by a number of unenforced laws.

much energy on an unending succession of cases many of which are only moderately hopeful, and each of which is dealt with one by one, as if it had no bearing on any others. It is, in short, an indication that we are moving away from the thought of cases of need in their individual aspect to a conception that they have important typical aspects not yet identified.

This dissatisfaction with an old point of view has recurred in the development of social work. Roughly, one might speak of three phases in social work: The first a period of unorganized benevolence, the second a period during which organization has developed, the third the period into which we are just emerging. The second period has given us methods of organization which have been tested out for different kinds of agency—child-placing, family welfare, etc.—has established such agencies in all parts of the country, and has also given us a technique of case work—altogether a very creditable showing. The routine procedure of this case work is based on a preoccupation with the individual needs of the clients. During the last few years, however, the influence of schools of social work and of sociologists has been pressing us toward a different conception of case work and of the function of private agencies. We are beginning to think of a future in which the concern with cases of need, while no less humane and sympathetic on the individual side, will stress the typical or social aspects of these cases, and in which case-work agencies—at any rate in the larger cities and in places where public authorities do fair work—will gradually become what may be described as social laboratories. Since private agencies, because of limited funds, must perforce select their cases, enlightened opinion will back them up in selecting on such a basis that the study of these cases will yield a more explicit understanding of social ills than we can get at present.

This means that an agency would accept for care some typical group of case problems—a group of unmarried mothers from broken homes, a group of borderline feeblemined boys, and so on. Study of these cases would go on simultaneously with treatment. Such case work with its accompanying research should gradually give to our discussion of causative factors and

of constructive social measures an explicitness inevitably wanting at present. "Broken homes," for example, is a recognized factor in delinquency of girls and we take it unquestioningly as an explanation. Yet we know many broken homes in which girls grow up respectably. What is it in certain instances of them that makes mischief? What are the social values missed by this or that girl, and why does the lack of those values work just as it does? Are all broken homes alike in the values missed or are there instructive differences between them? Since broken homes appear in all walks of life, the answers to such questions will have a general interest.

Another problem which ultimately may be a public responsibility but which in the meantime calls for the flexible experimenting of private effort is the extramural supervision of the high-grade or borderline feebleminded. The types of persons so handicapped who can be successfully kept in the community, the kind of environmental protection they need, the methods and cost of supervising their lives could all be privately tried out. When or if this experiment brought the legislature to give public authorities duties of oversight, the successes and failures privately met would enable them to install methods of care faster and with surer effectiveness. Such cases, involving the social treatment of defective clients, are of just the long-continued, unpromising sort to discourage boards of directors when they are dealt with merely as individuals. If agencies, however, think of them as also members of a typical group, the systematic comparative study of which will throw light on maladjustments or problems common to mankind, directors and case workers alike will feel their efforts worth while, even when their cases show a disheartening succession of individual misfortunes.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL CASE INTERPRETATION FOR RESEARCH

Probably all workers in the more progressive case-work agencies believe that the histories of assisted individuals, of which they make written records covering months or years of oversight, ought to be available for research purposes. They recognize that these documents have a social usefulness. They believe that were the observations and experience of the case worker in her "individualized" treatment of one instance of need after another correlated with those of other workers they might contribute to the integrated insight of social science, and in turn draw confirmations of her treatment methods that should mark progress in her professional thinking.

Various attempts thus to correlate the material in case histories have been made with greater or less success. Studies which have aimed at a simple sort of statistical showing have served a practical purpose by keeping boards of directors in touch with an agency's work or by presenting to possible contributors the more objective sort of social needs. Studies, however, whose worth has depended upon the validity of interpretations to be given to complex social facts have been of more doubtful reliability and service.

There are two reasons why the latter sort of study does not get far. The first is that social case workers and students who deal with the histories of maladjusted men and women, when they come to interpreting these facts lose sight of the true nature of "interpretation" or "diagnosis"; the second, which perhaps springs out of the first, is that case workers express their diagnoses without the precision necessary for science.

The Nature of Case Interpretation

Interpretation or diagnosis is the discovery of cause-effect relations among fact-items which taken separately are without relevance to any purpose, but which as causally related to each

other bear a special total import. The following illustrations show fact-items grouped under the meanings that spring out of their relations:

Filial distrust.

Winifred found through neighbors that confidences she had made to her stepmother were being repeated. Her stepmother was disloyal to her individually and as part of the family. Winifred's sister said that stepmother told neighbors details of Winifred's early misconduct, and about the personal affairs of her other stepchildren. It would not do to tell her father of her present trouble, because he would tell his wife and she would repeat the story outside.

Maternal-sexual conflict.

Ida kept her child against the opposition of her family, remaining in a wet-nurse position with it for ten months. A month or two later her standards for the baby's care slackened, her devotion became spasmodic. She kept it clean and would make sacrifices to get clothes for it, but did not want to give up her pleasures with men. She went off with a girl friend for several days, trusting her baby to the foster mother. On her return she neither looked at the child nor inquired about him, leaving the house immediately with a man acquaintance. As she left she asked the foster mother casually "everything all right?"

Spontaneous paternal responsibility.

When the alleged father knew of the existence of Mary's child he acknowledged it at once and was willing to support it. He agreed to pay $4.00 a week, and has paid it regularly for three years. He asked to see the child and would have liked to take it to bring up with his legitimate children.

The meaning for a diagnosis of Winifred's case is here phrased as filial distrust; of Ida's, as maternal-sexual conflict; of Mary's, as spontaneous paternal responsibility. The alleged disloyalty of the stepmother "caused" distrust in Winifred, and this in turn "caused" her to be reticent with her father. Ida's affection for her child and her liking for men "caused" a conflict of interest. The alleged father's sense of responsibility "caused" his willingness to support Mary's child and his offer to take it. The

groups of facts in these illustrations are knit together so closely that their meaning seems almost a part of them. Taken by itself, any one fact-item in any of these illustrations would miss clearness of significance. The item "Winifred found through neighbors that confidences she had made to her stepmother were being repeated" might mean that Winifred was so loose a talker that she habitually let out secrets without realizing it. The item "when the alleged father knew of the existence of Mary's child, he acknowledged it at once and was willing to support it" might have meant the momentary response of the man of easy promises. The causal relevance of every fact-item that is mentioned constitutes its sole claim upon the student's attention.

Starting with a hazy notion of the nature of diagnosis, the actual interpretations of facts made by the case worker in the course of her daily practice are apt to be impressionistic. They may be a summarizing of outstanding fact-items in a given case, a list of what appear to be the causative factors, or a mixture of outstanding fact-items, of causative factors, and of meanings attributed to these items and factors. As a rule, no formal method is followed in getting at these quasi-interpretations of a client's difficulty. It may be done by the worker who knows the client, or it may be done in conference between several persons who know different aspects of the problem or situation discussed. In either case, the analysis of evidence which precedes it is of a very sketchy sort. For experienced workers such looseness of intellectual procedure proves roughly adequate so far as an understanding of the immediate situation of the client is concerned, and when his problem is a simple one, may "size up" the requirements for continued care. Yet the impressionistic and often casual character of this diagnosing means, as an examination of case histories will show, that agencies run a risk of not getting the full meaning and perspective of the facts which their workers have gone to the pains of collecting. For the purposes of scientific study a diagnosis that consists merely of a loose summarizing of facts is entirely unfruitful.

A correlative result of unsystematic interpreting is that social case-work agencies fail to recognize recurrence in conduct

and situation except in an ill-defined way. This is evidenced by the fact that they have but few and hazy diagnostic terms. Such terms as "unmarried mother," "dependent mother," "non-support case," "neglected child," etc., etc., are all blanket words for recurring maladjustments, each of which shows important typical variations not yet identified with sufficient clearness to bring forth appropriate descriptive names. There are many unnamed types of unmarried mothers, dependent mothers, neglected child cases. This poverty and vagueness of nomenclature both spring from and occasion a vagueness of thought.

The student of case histories must do what the agencies, designed for the prompt relief of need, cannot stop to do: he must develop a method that promises steady advance towards precision in diagnosis and towards a correspondingly exact nomenclature. To this end he must make his interpretations *explicit*. For instance, the cause-effect items in the illustrations given get a clear-cut explicitness in "filial distrust," "maternal-sexual conflict," and "spontaneous paternal responsibility." By thus expressing interpretations in phrases of from one to three carefully chosen words, one takes an essential step in scientific method.

The reasons for attributing importance to the development of interpretative phrases lie in the intimate interaction between language and thought.[1] A word or a phrase—a symbol of mean-

[1] "It is in the highest degree likely that language is an instrument originally put to uses lower than the conceptual plane and that thought arises as a refined interpretation of its content. The product grows, in other words, with the instrument, and thought may be no more conceivable, in its genesis and daily practice, without speech than is mathematical reasoning practicable without the lever of an appropriate mathematical symbolism. * * * We see this complex process of the interaction of language and thought actually taking place under our eyes. * * * The birth of a new concept is invariably foreshadowed by a more or less strained or extended use of old linguistic material; the concept does not attain to individual and independent life until it has found a distinctive linguistic embodiment. In most cases the new symbol is but a thing wrought from linguistic material already in existence in ways mapped out by crushingly despotic precedents. As soon as the word is at hand, we instinctively feel, with something of a sigh of relief, that the concept is ours for the handling. Not until we own the symbol do we feel that we hold a key to the immediate knowledge or understanding of the concept."—*Language*, Edward Sapir, p. 16.

ing—is a vital thing. The very effort to get an apt term to represent the meaning of a group of fact-items acts like a magnet on other related items which one had not recognized as such. The process of thinking out an expression like "filial distrust" is a process of selecting from the mass of fact-items in a case history those which make for and those which make against such an interpretation. Once such a descriptive phrase has been suggested as the meaning of a given set of fact-items, it sharpens observation in studying other histories. One begins to note both other instances of filial distrust, and also distinctions between this special kind of filial distrust and additional kinds as yet but half suspected. The content, the meaning of the phrase becomes clarified and enriched.[1] Its meaning may indeed become so much enriched that this phrase will be superseded by two or three phrases to express the distinctions between one kind of filial distrust and another kind, distinctions which a systematic reflection about experience has shown to be important.

Besides making interpretation clear and pregnant, brief phrases have it in them to develop into a set of diagnostic terms common to all case work. Such terms, if developed with caution as the material in our case histories makes this possible, would lend themselves to comparisons between histories, possibly in time to statistical use.

Precise Interpretation a Basis for Systematic Comparison

The degree of precision in interpreting the fact-items in our case histories which has been here indicated is an essential of any systematic comparative study of these histories. It is obvious that the social histories of no two clients could be compared, were the attempt made to set the ultimate fact-items in

[1] "It is a common experience that to find fit language for our impressions not only renders them clear and definite to ourselves and to others, but in the process leads to deeper insight and fresh discoveries, at once explaining and extending our knowledge. * * * Impressions may anticipate words, but unless expression seizes and recreates them they soon fade away, or remain but vain and indefinite to the mind which received them, and incommunicable to others."—"The Teaching of English in England", London, 1921, p. 20.

the one over against the ultimate fact-items in the other. The items taken separately have not enough meaning to be comparable. Some interpretation must organize them into units of significance before comparison begins, the former process being expressed in progressively exact terms in order to facilitate the latter. Comparison, recognized as an integral part of a scientific method, is a way of making fact-items in one client's history illuminate the meaning in another history of fact-items which might otherwise be overlooked because of their apparently trifling character. In other words, it makes information about a given conduct-pattern in case A, even though inadequate, help out a different inadequacy of information as to the same conduct-pattern in case B or C. Various features, significant for treatment, may recur in A, B, C, and so on, yet so faintly that they escape the notice even of an experienced worker as she meets them casually and in random sequence among other features. The students' organizing helps to superimpose them, so that their faint lineaments emerge as by a composite photography. If one were to compare twenty histories in all of which "filial distrust" appeared as a factor, one would find that the fact-items behind the interpretation "filial distrust" differed perhaps considerably in content. Sometimes it would be a daughter and mother, as in our illustration, sometimes a son and father; sometimes misconduct, sickness, jealousies, lack of affection might enter in as causative factors or as resulting behavior. Yet when these twenty instances of "filial distrust" were compared, resemblances between factors, whether of conduct or situation would begin to stand out. In certain of the instances the fact-items would show a resemblance as something distinct, in others they would only hint at it. The study of all twenty together would throw light on the elements entering into filial distrust as a recurring conduct-pattern, and might even suggest tentatively certain typical differentiations of the pattern.

The use of comparison, common to all scientific fields, has an especial value for the field of the social thinker. It tends to make conspicuous the social aspect of individual conduct, by revealing typical attitudes to social values, or responses to similar

situations. A comparison between the family backgrounds of a group of normal girls who have got into difficulty of one sort or another would show in their families habits of feeling and acting about social conventions which are habits partly at least because they reflect ideas shared by many families. These typical attitudes must be identified if educational "forces" are to reshape them.

The systematic study of social case histories here advocated cannot be made from these histories as they are now written by social agencies in narrative form. The first step in such study must be a topical analysis of the material in each history used.[1] An analytical scheme for social study must lay emphasis upon social categories. Those suggested by the present writer are the categories which life itself imposes. The *family* is the inner circle that first imparts to the personality an incubation of character and assimilation of its social heritage; *sex* in any view is a sort of magnetic current running through life with various reinforcing or deflecting possibilities for conduct; *occupation* and *recreation* afford obvious theatres for the realizing of social possibilities; and *religion* enlists the influence of various character-swaying imponderables. While such a topical history does not give the total "picture" of the case, it makes comparison between cases possible. Comparison cannot be made between total pictures but must be between factors of the same kind within these pictures. To put it differently, we cannot speak of a whole social *case* as being typical; it is certain situations and conduct-patterns within it that are typical. One may say of a given unmarried mother that her sex-conduct conforms to a type—many other unmarried mothers have exhibited the same sex-conduct—but this conduct plus her maternal attitude plus her success at work and so on becomes progressively less typical and more individual.

[1] For a discussion of topical analyzing for diagnosis see the present writer's *Social Case History*, p. 148 (Russell Sage Foundation, 1920). Any introspective case worker will recognize that the moment she asks herself what are the conduct and situation problems she has to meet in order to help her client, she begins to arrange her information about him *in her own mind* under such topics as health, family situation, occupation and so on.

The total sequence or combination of conduct-patterns and situations with their interaction is unique. Yet the worker who aims to "individualize" her treatment must first have sensitized her mind to a recognition of situations and patterns as factors that recur among many individuals.

Even a topical history, of course, takes account of the sequence of episode and situation that dominates a purely narrative history. When a client's case runs over months or years, it becomes highly instructive for the student of progressive interactions between habit and situation. Adjustment or maladjustment takes place by stages in a developing course. A topical analysis gives due recognition to the time-elements in a case by taking its data phase by phase—each phase representing the working out of one stage in the whole causal process.[1] In this way the topical history keeps its emphasis upon diagnostic values where narrative history tends to play up dramatic values.

It may be that workers accustomed to the narrative form for writing histories will raise the objection to an analytic interest that it slights the individuality of clients. In answer the student may suggest that there may be degrees of individuality among people, many clients having less of it than workers who grow interested in them would like to believe. Men and women whose starved lives afford but a limited choice in activity have simple conduct-patterns which are comprised within a few elemental groupings such as those of family and work. This is what mental impoverishment means. The total picture of such lives, therefore, made up relatively speaking of a small number of simple types of conduct and situation, lends itself more readily to classification, is more easily thought of as a "typical case" than is the total picture of a life of rich and varied opportunity. The latter life with its numerous complex groupings through business, professional, educational, philanthropic, and other social activities, presents a combination and interplay of conduct and situation which would seldom if ever be found repeated in another person. For it must be remembered that each different social activity

[1] *Social Case History*, p. 168.

which a man takes on, be it membership in a trade union, a chamber of commerce, a school board, a church committee, does not go on in a compartment by itself but affects in one way or another all his other activities. His trade union interests affect not only his work but his home and his politics; his school board connection influences his decisions and perhaps his standing as a member of a church or of a chamber of commerce committee and so on. If one tries to imagine the effect of a lopping off of these interests in such a life, one can perhaps get a clearer idea of what mental and social impoverishment really means. It means an unexpanded, narrowly inclusive self.

Yet however close to the typical a client's conduct and situation may be, the attempt to get a total "picture" of it commits one to a simplifying of his life history to a few outstanding incidents which fall in with one's special slant of interest in the case. This way of thinking about social case histories has its valid uses—in other directions than that of scientific study. As will appear later, its selection of facts amounts to an implicit interpretation of them as contrasted with the explicit interpretation demanded as a basis of research. The social case worker who objects to the topical analysis of a client's history on the ground that he thereby loses his "picture" of the client should not deceive himself into thinking that he is displaying an appreciation of the complex nature of "individuality." It is not he but the analyst who gets the more adequate sense of complexity. The former's impressionistically unified conception of the fact-items in a client's history tends to make the client's conduct as a whole, his "individuality," appear to conform much more closely to a *type* than the facts would actually warrant. In other words, the client, in the mind of such a worker, is being not more but less "individualized" than in the mind of the student.

After the fact-items in a social case history have been topically analyzed, all interpretation of these fact-items must be explicit and open to review and revision. In other words, the word or brief phrase which embodies the interpretation must in every instance stand over against the group of fact-items of whose meaning it is the symbol, as has been done in the case of

all illustrations in this chapter. In this way the student's "personal equation" is above board and it becomes possible for successive students to criticize and to supplement one another's work. In the social field it is especially necessary that such revision should be provided for. Not only is the subject-matter new and complex, it is one in which the traditions and training of the student are bound to affect his interpretation of fact-items.[1] Indeed, herein is his peculiar contribution. If he does his best to make himself aware of and to allow for his prejudices, he can trust that others with different backgrounds and stores of experience will contribute their characteristic insights to supplement or qualify his. For a long time to come these interpretations of conduct and social situation must thus be thought of as tentative.

In order that the social student's interpretations may be open to review it is necessary not only that he should accompany them with the fact-items on which they are based, but that he should exercise caution in condensing the original record of these items in the case histories. The need for this warning lies in the fact that the case histories of social agencies are often prolix. Impatience with wordiness or with seeming irrelevance may easily lead a student either to discard or to reduce to a generalized statement fact-items that, while of trifling evidential value taken item by item, may taken together yield an integrated meaning. The objection to such a compressing of evidence is that compression is in itself a process of interpretation. By discarding fact-items or by condensing a number of them into a merely general statement, the student is imposing his own diagnosis upon them in a way that is not open to review by other students. He obliges the latter to accept his interpretation because he has denied them the data on which he based it. For study purposes, therefore, it is necessary to include every fact-item however trifling, provided

[1] Indeed, as I have previously noted (*Studies of the Boston Conference on Illegitimacy*, 1914), the traditions and training of the observer more or less condition the *nature* of the fact-items that make their appearance "Two visitors who know the same girl may, through their different personalities, *bring out* and become cognizant of quite different facts in her experience. In this sense the subject-matter of much social study is unstable. Not only do two students perceive different facts, they actually in a measure make different facts to be perceived."

that when taken with other items it goes to make up a meaning.

There is another reason why for scientific study social histories may have to remain detailed for the present, and that lies in the conditions of work and in the training of those who collect the facts. Dictation for typewriting when done under pressure gives histories which are again and again so loosely expressed that one cannot be sure enough of the exact meaning of a sentence as to venture on a concise rewording of it. If the meaning of these fact-items appears clear when they are viewed along with others, the student may in spite of their haziness in themselves use them to further interpretation. The training of workers, important strides though it has made, cannot get far in equipping them to heed the fact-items of most relevance in their clients' histories, because it cannot yet supply their minds with a funded thought, with a requisite set of expectations. It is just here that a research worker's method for precise interpreting should prove of service in training case workers. It should draw from case histories diagnoses which will quicken the minds of workers with expectations of a sort to awaken observation and to make their selection of material more discerning. If, for instance, a recurring import becomes disclosed in "filal distrust," "spontaneous responsibility," "maternal-sexual conflict," which will interest workers and sharpen their perceptions it will mean that they will soon be getting into their histories more pertinent material bearing on these conduct-shaping ideas. With improved material the student can then in turn draw sharpened interpretations which may be of value in treatment.

If compression is an implicit interpreting, so also in a somewhat different sense is the common use of descriptive terms without fact-items behind them. Note, for example, the talicized terms in the following statements:

> Mrs. Jones realizes Eleanor's *superficiality* nd *self-centeredness.*
>
> Fannie had been a *good, quiet* girl, *obedient, truthful,* and *helpful* in every way.
>
> The Browns live in a *middle-class* residentialneighborhood.

Such words as *self-centered, obedient, truthful, lazy, middle-class,* are commonly employed in social case histories as if they conveyed a statement of fact, whereas actually each of them represents an opinion, a snap judgment upon numerous half-noted acts of the person so described. Many acts on the part of Eleanor and of Fannie went to make up what was called self-centeredness or obedience and truthfulness; many factors of structure, upkeep, congestion entered into the neighborhood described as "middle-class."

The mental process by which such description is arrived at is the reverse of that which precedes interpretation. "A good, quiet girl, obedient, truthful, and helpful" stands for a comparatively unanalyzed impression of a total of conduct. The undisciplined mind thinks only in such wholes. Since many of the people from whom social workers gather their information have untrained mental processes, the latter are apt to think of the conduct of a daughter, a nephew, a boarder, in terms of its total impression and to give little heed to the specific acts which have given rise to that impression. Although these impressions are not without a certain value as giving a general estimate of character, they must, as the scientific study of conduct increases, be felt as less and less adequate. Conduct which one person would describe as obedient, another would call suggestible; what to one would seem truthfulness, to another would appear to be discourtesy or lack of imagination; what a first observer sees as self-centeredness another might regard as sensibility or even as forcefulness. The term "middle-class" was applied by one social worker to a street occupied by well-built old houses which were being rapidly crowded in at sides and back by "three-decker" tenements—a replacement of well-to-doYankees by foreign-born working people. Another worker used the same word to describe a street made up of small single houses with yards, some of which had been built or adapted for two families—a neighborhood which had been unchanged in outer aspect for many years, Whether between these two neighborhoods there was a common factor in the economic level of the dwellers information is insufficient to determine. Certain it is that other workers might apply the

same term to somewhat more prosperous streets than these. Probably the two workers referred to, in using the word "middle-class," were expressing what was merely a general impression of streets tenanted by self-supporting families of small means. An adjective that is thus used to describe anything that lies between slums and well-to-do streets has too little meaning to be of value. Differences in the habitats and physical surroundings of people are of enough importance in the ways in which they reflect and affect character to make requisite more exact distinctions drawn between various types of neighborhoods and more exact terms invented to describe them. Dr. Ira Wyle, writing of "laziness" in school children,[1] calls attention to various types of conduct so stigmatized, and urges discrimination between laziness, inertia, indolence, sloth, idleness. In other words, analysis of the fact-items that make up the total usually called "laziness" show it to be a blanket term for several types of conduct each of which would call for different social treatment.

If case histories are to serve social research the future training of the social case workers must prepare them not only to analyze their own impressions—that goes almost without saying—it must also fit them to perform the more difficult task of eliciting a real analysis of the client's conduct and surroundings on the part of his parents and friends—people who more often than not are habituated to the mere registering of impressions. Skill of this sort must precede any progressively effective understanding and treatment of maladjusted situations. A first step toward such a training and skill could be taken by the practice of accompanying descriptive terms in the case histories, whenever possible, by the fact-items on which they are based. Thus:

Kind-hearted.

Employer says "Jennie is kind-hearted. She insisted on my staying in bed when I was not feeling well, brought up my meals, and did my part of the work as well as her own. She is almost too ready to help the children with their lessons."

[1] *Mental Hygiene*, Jan., 1922.

Emotionally unstable.

Margaret shows much emotional instability, sometimes overflowing with animal spirits and hilarity, at other times in the blue depths of depression.

When evidence is thus displayed in juxtaposition with the impression of kind-heartedness and instability created by it, the case worker and the student alike can note its inadequacies and can point out certain additional evidence needed. Was this conduct of Jennie's usual or did it occur when she wanted favors? Did Margaret's ups and downs bear any relation to her physical condition or to the praise or blame accorded her by others?—and so on. While certain fact-items as to Jennie's conduct are known, items about the setting for that conduct (an approaching picnic, perhaps) and items indicative of her own attitude (self-interest as against social sensitiveness) are lacking; and while certain items of a general sort about Margaret's conduct are known, items about its setting (the outer provocations for her alleged moods) and about her health as a factor in her attitude are lacking. In other words, "kind-hearted" and "emotionally unstable" are both seen to be vague, impressionistic terms in that the fact-items that supply the content of their meaning in these instances include items about only one of the three elements—conduct, setting ("environmental stimulus"), and attitude of the actor—that enter into a conduct-pattern. It is only by this sort of analysis that more explicit meanings can be developed for a vocabulary descriptive of conduct and situation.

The development of explicit meanings for words of praise and blame has a professional interest to the case worker. These words are a social tool employed by any and every group of people for molding or disciplining its members into habits useful to the purposes of the group in question. A refinement of the meaning of such words, brought about by the collecting of the fact-items in many actual instances of conduct called "kind-hearted," "unstable," and so on, would confront the worker with such facts for self-knowledge as would train her to make her comment on the conduct and situation of her client more exact and hence more influential.

For instance, a comparison of the evidence on which twenty-five instances of conduct described as "over-conscientious" had been so termed, might change this adjective from one which case workers as well as others think of as conveying approval of moral intent to one which they would clearly recognize as implying disapproval of faulty social perspective. It might demonstrate the kind of mischief wrought by ethical piddling.

The Unit of Interpretation

With the fact-items in a social case history arranged under categories—health, family, habitat, occupation, etc.—and with precautions taken against implicit interpretations, the research student is confronted with the question, how many of the fact-items in the history shall he include within a single interpretation? He can follow any one of four alternatives. First, he can think of all the items in a history as pointing to one diagnosis, *e. g.*, a non-support case, a dependent mother, deserted wife, delinquent boy, difficult girl case. The objection to such diagnoses is that they have only a partial sort of utility. Even for their purposes of immediate treatment social case workers feel a need of cutting in deeper than this. Second, the student can sense a meaning for all the items falling within one general category. The items about John's health could be interpreted in such phrases as "vigorous and normal," or as "delicate and undernourished" and so on; those about his family in such as "earnest, devoted parents," or as "deteriorating broken home"; those about his occupation, as "steady textile worker," or as "roving cabinet maker." These phrases, while more explicit than "non-support" or "delinquent boy" case, are still too general. The lack in explicitness strikes one most in the phrases applied to health. Is this because in the established science of medicine analysis has gone so much further than in social thinking that even a layman suspects such a phrase as "vigorous and normal" to need qualification in some important particular? The phrases "earnest devoted parents," "steady textile worker," etc., are also vague in important ways—in ways, that is, that leave understanding more inexact and treatment more

groping than they need be. The explanation of vagueness in these phrases is the same as of that in the words "kind-hearted" and "emotionally unstable" just discussed. "Earnest devoted parents" takes account only of the parents' attitude, and ignores not only the acts through which the earnestness and devotion got expressed—acts which may have been unintelligent—but also the environment—which may have been one which the parents themselves did not understand and hence one in which they could not successfully guide their children. To say of a juvenile offender, therefore, that he has "earnest devoted parents" is to offer an interpretation of his family background so vague as to give rise to what may be an erroneous impression of the influences actually operative within his home. "Steady textile worker" leaves out of account the employee's attitude—liking or loathing—and his occupational setting—insanitary or the reverse. Is his steadiness a hopeless acquiescence or a cheerful purposiveness?

For purposes of treatment diagnoses of this second sort are useful in default of anything better. If, however, the treatment of maladjusted situations is to become progressively discriminating in its application of means to ends, these diagnoses are as much too vague and general to forward such practical purposes as they are to serve the purposes of research. It may be thought, therefore, that the student is reduced to employing a third course of interpretation: the supplying of a separate diagnostic term for every fact-item in a social case history. This could conceivably be done. The attempt to do it, however, quickly demonstrates that in a social history single fact-items, while they have meaning, are apt to have insufficient meaning to serve any social purpose. In other words, social fact-items are not discrete; they are rather so knit together in a causally relevant network that in drawing out any one item one necessarily draws out, if his mind is on its *significance,* a number of others which cling to it. Social meaning, therefore, is a property not of single fact-items, as a rule, but of groups of items. Interpretation and its descriptive terms should be applied to the smallest group of fact-items which has a social import. Such a cluster of fact-items may be thought

of as a unit of meaning, a social fact. This is the fourth method of interpreting, and is the one here advocated.

To determine in any given instance what is the smallest group of these fact-items which has social import is a matter of judgment. Nevertheless, a fair consensus of judgment should be possible where the interpretative purpose is the same. Let us consider the following "units of meaning."

Self-sacrificing maternal frugality.

Mrs. Melledge had her ticket back (to her home village) and $16.00 cash, of which she planned to give Beatrice $15.00 to pay her board in the maternity home. Although it would be three months before she received her next pension money, she proposed to return home with $1.00. She said she had potatoes in the house and might be able to sell a little wood.

Unloving marital-filial covertness.

Gertrude said that when her father would forbid her leaving the yard to play with boys, her stepmother would quietly tell her to run out the back way. Looking back she now believes her stepmother wanted her to get into trouble so that she would have to leave home; yet at the same time she recalls with bitterness her father's "interference" with her boy friendships.

Filial affection.

Patricia wrote her father a long letter and repeatedly said to others that she was eager to see him. She preferred to have him see her after the birth of her child, because she believed it would be easier for him than when confinement was imminent. When the baby had come and her father had not been in, Patricia appeared hurt.

While the fact-items "Mrs. Melledge had her ticket back and $16.00 cash," "Gertrude said that her father would forbid her leaving the yard to play with boys," "Patricia wrote her father a long letter" each means something taken by itself, its meaning is too incomplete for social thinking. On the other hand, each of these groupings of items has a meaning clear enough to warrant one in giving it a tentative term. It is the smallest identifiable fragment of a conduct-pattern or situation.

The student must of course expect that occasionally the same fact-item may unite with more than one group to make different meanings. The item "Ida held wet-nurse position with her baby for nine months" here joined with other items to make the meaning *maternal-sexual conflict,* might be ranged along with a different set of items to give *industrial instability.*

> Ida worked for one year in different shops in her home town. After the baby's birth *she held two wet-nurse positions with it for nine months.* Her employers said she was slack—no concentration. She was then placed at board with the baby for two months, during which time she worked in four different shops.

In the first grouping Ida's holding two positions for several months each is taken along with other fact-items as evidence of her love for her child and desire to have it with her; in the second grouping, taken with a different set of fact-items, it indicates that her best occupational showing was pretty poor.

It will undoubtedly be recognized that any and all of the groupings or clusters of fact-items here given as illustrations get their meaning—*filial distrust, maternal-sexual conflict, self-sacrificing maternal frugality,* etc., etc.,—not only from the cause-effect relation among their respective fact-items but also from a felt relation between these meanings and the whole course of the case history. This is necessarily so, since, as said before, all the fact-items in any social history get their relevance within a causal network. In identifying such a partial meaning as *filial distrust* or *maternal-sexual conflict* the student has at the back of his mind the remotor causes and effects of the conduct-patterns here involved as they appear in the respective case histories. Indeed, it is these remoter causes and effects, either known or foreshadowed, which give the patterns importance and which show them as typical or recurring. The maternal-sexual conflict is a typical conduct-pattern in unmarried motherhood. Two sets of feeling and behaving habits, the maternal and sexual, which in married life may even reinforce each other, under conditions of unmarried maternity will often compete, with consequences for mother and child and for the public. In the process of analysis

it may be a sense of these imperfectly observed consequences which gives the student his pre-vision of the concept maternal-sexual conflict. The mind moves constantly back and forth between the content of a given partial interpretation on the one hand and the rest of the social history on the other.

Following is a skeletonized section of a social case history, reduced to forty-eight fact-items. These items have been combined into fifteen groupings in accordance with what appear to be their most immediate causal bearings, and an interpretative phrase has been given each grouping.

A Dependent Mother Case

Fact-Items

1. Mother, now deceased, lived in miserable rooms over a saloon for five years. (1916-21.)
2. Her husband before his death took this place because low rent and he employed in saloon below.
3. Landlord allowed mother to stay without paying (pending her insurance money).
4. Mother gave as reason for staying the fact that she did not want to change school for children (April, 1917).
5. Her brothers and aunt, chagrined at her quarters, wished her to move to a suburb near them. Offered to help, as did also friends and foster relatives. (1916 and 1917.)
6. Mother said (April, 1917) that the poor locality made her friends stop coming to see her.
7. Neighbors' daughters would not go with daughter Grace because of locality. (April, 1917.)
8. Childhood friend of mother said (May, 1917): (a) She was well behaved but stubborn as a child; (b) she is now (May, 1917) losing ground morally; (c) he has seen her intoxicated.
9. Mother's foster aunt said (Jan., 1917): she (a) had had careful bringing up; (b) went down-hill after marriage.
10. Mother's own aunt said (Nov., 1916): she had poor bringing up. (Kind but careless foster parents.)
11. Mother said (Nov., 1920): she withdrew from Baptist Church partly because she and her children did not fare well at Christmas.
12. A neighbor informed the overseers of the poor (Aug., 1918) that mother buys beer.
13. Mother said beer was for her neighbor upstairs.

14. She gave this explanation a week later only after being pressed for one.
15. Neighbor upstairs confirmed her explanation.
16. Social worker saw her boy of 12 years apparently intoxicated. (April, 1917.)
17. Visiting housekeeper said (Feb., 1920): (a) Mother incompetent housekeeper; (b) does not stay at home.
18. Family mother worked for said (1922) she was an incapable and indifferent worker.
19. They had known her five years. (1916-21.)
20. She kept a man lodger five years. (1916-21.)
21. She declined work at a dispensary on ground that men were around there. (Nov., 1916.)
22. At different times during five years of widowhood gave her earnings as $2.00 to $4.50 per week. (1916-21.)
23. She asked social worker for more work. (April, 1916.)
24. A woman told social worker in district that mother died of miscarriage. (June, 1922.)
25. This informant according to social worker not a gossip.
26. Overseers of poor said (April, 1916) mother is honest and reliable.
27. Fulton Market man spoke well of her. (Feb., 1916.)
28. She paid her landlord 3 months' back rent, and paid other bills. (Dec., 1916.)
29. Policeman on beat says daughter Grace used to swear fluently. (April, 1922.)
30. Grace had to be kept at school by truant officer during last months before age of 14. (Sept., 1916.)
31. Grace's employer dismissed her (Oct., 1916) because: (a) she went on the street with boys; (b) she neglected her work.
32. Miss F. of ——— House said (Mar., 1917): (a) Grace frequents the street with boys; (b) Grace seems to be wild.
33. Overseers' visitor believed (April, 1917) Grace wild.
34. Social worker said (April, 1917): (a) Grace pretty and bold-looking girl; (b) apparently going wrong; (c) on the street most of the time; (d) saw her hanging about the entrance to a saloon with a young man.
35. Mother's doctor questioned (Jan., 1922) Grace's morals.
36. Mr. Morse, a childhood friend of Grace's mother, would not let his daughter play with Grace (May, 1917) on ground that Grace was wild.
37. Grace married (Dec., 1918) at 16 without her mother's knowledge.

38. Grace's husband a man of poor repute (gambling and dishonesty). (1922.)
39. Grace's income, as reported (Apr., 1922) is inadequate to respectable living.
40. Neighbors saw (Jan., 1922) her young sisters stealing from a market wagon.
41. Policeman warned Grace and her husband that unless this stopped he would have them up as receiving stolen goods.
42. Since this warning, the children have looked better cared for, and there have been no further complaints.
43. Children begged (1922) of mother's former employer.
44. In January, 1922, children came to office of relief society for aid—apparently at Grace's instigation.
45. Police referred (Feb., 1922) children to Prevention of Cruelty Society because they had gone around begging.
46. Neighbors say the children seem better cared for than when mother was alive.
47. Grace has become Catholic (her husband's religion) and has had her young sisters do the same.
48. Grace says she feels her mother's early separation from her family was regrettable, and wished to spare her sisters that experience.

Social Facts

a. Questionably trained mother (foster child) *8*,[1] 9, 10.
b. Financially reliable widow, 26, 27, 28.
c. Disreputable habitat, *1, 2, 5, 6, 7.*
d. Deteriorated status, c (habitat), 3, 4, *30.*
e. Shiftless houseworker, *17,* 18, 19, 22, 23, (*21*).
f. Intemperate mother, 12, 13, 14, 15, *16, 8.*
g. Circumspectly incontinent widow? *20, 21,* 24, 25.
h. Maternal neglect, c (habitat), d (status), k (unchaste daughter), l (filial secretiveness), *16, 30, 17, 46, 20.*
i. Perfunctory worker, *31.*
j. Coarse-mannered girl (daughter), *31, 33, 34, 36, 29.*

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[1] **The italicized numerals stand for fact-items which appear in more than one grouping. Question marks indicate a highly tentative interpretation.**

k. Unchaste girl (daughter)? j (coarse-mannered girl), *31*, 35.
l. Filial secretiveness[1] (ill-selected clandestine mating), *37*, *38*.
m. Exploitation of siblings, *39*, 40, 41, *42*, 43, 44, 45.
n. Fraternal responsibility, *46*, *47*, 48, *42*, *39*.
o. Increasing religious seriousness, 11, *47*.

SOCIAL-FACT GROUPS

a—h. Demoralizing home conditions; broken home.
i—l. Difficult girl (wayward, wild).
i—o. Apparently regenerating girl?

TYPE OF CASE

a—o. Dependent mother.

As will be at once observed, the items fall, many of them, into more than one grouping, or "social fact." Also, a given grouping may bear more than one interpretation, depending upon the worker's purpose at the moment. If the agency's treatment of Grace began after she was married, and took into account her relation with her husband, the interpretation of items 37 and 38 might be "ill-selected clandestine marriage," whereas if treatment began while she was in her mother's home, centering on her as a difficult girl, the interpretative phrase might be "filial secretiveness." The same is true with regard to the interpretation "filial distrust" previously used. Were one's purpose the treatment of the stepmother, the same fact-items might be described as "disloyal stepmother." Items 4 and 30 which, so far as they go, con-

[1] In the small number of histories from which illustrations in this chapter have been drawn the writer has three times had to get an interpretative term to express a lack of frank affection between daughter and mother: *i. e., filial distrust, unloving parental-filial covertness*, and *filial secretiveness*. This of course suggests that here is a recurring factor in the situation of difficult girls. It is to be noted, however, that each of the three situations instanced seemed to call for a somewhat different term. This may mean that analysis of more histories will identify differences within this lack of parental-filial confidence such as may lead to a refinement on present treatment methods. As bearing on this suggestion note John Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 321: "We need a permeation of judgments on conduct by the method and materials of a science of human nature. Without such enlightenment even the best-intentioned attempts at the moral guidance and improvement of others often eventuate in tragedies of misunderstanding and division, as is so often seen in the relations of parents and children."

PUBLICATIONS

RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION

"A Study of 582 Applications" (out of print)
By Ada E. Sheffield

"What Becomes of the Unmarried Mother?"
By Alberta S. B. Guiland, M. D., and Ida R. Parker

"Case-Study Possibilities"
By Ada E. Sheffield